

President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters

Following is a transcript of President Reagan's news conference last night in Washington, as recorded by The New York Times:

OPENING STATEMENT

Good evening, I have a statement. I'm gratified that bipartisan consensus on arms control is emerging from the recommendations of the Soviet Commission. The report combined into one package three of our top-priority goals: modernization, deterrence and arms control. And I'm integrating their arms control recommendations into our START proposals. I will also support their proposal to develop a small single-warhead missile for more stable deterrence in the future.

Many in the Congress have shared their thinking on arms control with us. Close cooperation can show the Soviets that we Americans stand united, ready to negotiate in good faith until we succeed in reducing the level of nuclear weapons on both sides.

Working together, and exploring initiatives such as a proposed mutual build-down of strategic or nuclear forces, we can keep America strong and achieve arms reductions that strengthen the peace and benefit all mankind.

I congratulate both Appropriations Committees for their bipartisan approval of the MX Peacekeeper missile reauthorization by the Soviet Commission. The Soviet Commission demonstrated it could take on a complex issue and achieve bipartisan agreement. The question now is whether the Congress can also reach a consensus with the resolution and unity to strengthen our national security, reduce the risk of war and ultimately achieve reductions of nuclear weapons.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Budget Deficit

Q. Mr. President, in February 1981 you predicted a balanced budget for 1984, and now according to your arithmetic, we'll be \$190 billion in debt — deficit — for 1984. How will this affect your economic recovery program, and I'd like to follow up.

A. Helen, I think the fact is in February of '81 we were speaking the tone of all of the economic advisers there are, and no one foresaw the falling off of the stock market. July had been in a recession since 1979 in this country and no one knew or believed that it was going to take the big dip that it took then and which many people referred to as a separate recession.

I altered, naturally, our estimates on that. We know that we're going to have to have a sizable deficit in '83 and '84. But what the big dip did to our budget planning, and running into some objections, is set us on a path of decreasing deficits to where we can look down the road a few years and see ourselves approaching a balanced budget. This was what the '84 budget had in mind. And I don't see that kind of a path. And I don't see of course about 50 percent of the budget deficits we have to say are just on or are based on the recession, and as we have recovery and begin to come out of this, that will have an effect also on the size of the deficit.

Q. Since you've drawn a line on tax increases and further defense cuts, how would you cut domestic spending? I mean, to reduce the deficit further?

A. Well, in the budget that I submitted, we called it sort of a freeze at the time, and what it was based on was the 1983 budget, the present budget, plus 4 percent across the board for domestic spending, and this was on an estimate that we could bring inflation down to 4 percent by the end of '84. And if we had left the inflation rate where it was, that is, at 10 percent, we would be giving a real increase, over and above inflation, of the '83 spending. And I don't think that that's bad. I think that's why I still think that it is a budget that should be considered. Because that budget would have set us — started us — on the line of declining deficits, Jim.

Crisis in Mideast

Q. Mr. President, with the Syrians talking joining the Middle East negotiations, how will you and Ambassador Habib manage to encourage them to take part in the withdrawal and really, what reason do you have to be optimistic that this will be a peaceful resolution?

A. Well, one thing the Syrians are on record. They were invited by Lebanon to come in and help them in the troubles that were going on in Lebanon, and now Lebanon has said they are no longer needed and has invited them out. But, at the same time, the Syrians have repeatedly said that when the other forces leave, when the Israelis leave and so forth, they, too, will leave Lebanon.

Now I grant you they're saying some different things today. But I also know that a number of the Arab allies are urging them to stick with their word and to leave when all forces are prepared to leave. And I can believe that the Syrians want to find themselves alone separated from all of their Arab allies.

Q. Mr. President, to follow up on Jim's question, that specifically is the United States willing to do to encourage Syria to leave. For instance, the United States is willing to do something to the Soviets if they would help or willing to offer U.S. military and economic aid to the Syrians to encourage them to withdraw their troops from Lebanon?

A. Well, I think we've made it to see if I think they should be able to see

Another subject: The Senate will soon reconsider or consider — no, reconsider is the proper word — a budget resolution. Some say the Congressional budget process is at stake. I say the stakes for the American people are greater. The real question is, how do we keep our hard-won economic recovery moving forward, or do we stop recovery by reversing course? The answer for most Americans is clear.

In January, I proposed a commonsense budget to reduce deficits through defense cuts and a domestic spending freeze but with virtually no new taxes in 1984 or '85. The House and the Senate Budget Committees said no. They have voted to increase domestic spending and to raise the people's taxes by over a quarter of a trillion dollars.

Now, I'm supporting the so-called Domenici compromise, with less defense and more domestic spending than I really wanted — and to no avail. It is time to draw the line and stand up for the people. I don't support a budget resolution that raises taxes while we're coming out of a recession. I will veto any tax bill that would do that. And I've vetoed a bill that would rekindle the fires of inflation and high interest rates.

The American people don't send us to Washington to continue raising their taxes, spending more on wasteful programs or weakening our defenses. They send us here to stop that. And that's what we're going to try to do.

Now, Helen:

Q. Mr. President, several recent episodes suggest that some Administration officials are putting self-interest ahead of the public interest. I refer specifically to an assistant press secretary's promotion of a weapons system after receiving a \$50,000 consultant fee from that manufacturer of that weapons system, to an Assistant Secretary of Defense's recommending that Government weather satellites be sold at the same time he was negotiating for the sale of the satellites to the U.S. Information Agency's practice of giving high-paying jobs and contracts to members of the President's friends of top Administration officials? How do you feel about all this, sir?

A. Well, I think since every one of these things that you've mentioned is just on or are based on the recession, and as we have recovery and begin to come out of this, that will have an effect also on the size of the deficit.

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A. Well, you have to remember what the multinational forces went in there for. The multinational forces are there to help the new Government of Lebanon maintain order until it can organize its military and its police and assume control over its own borders and its own internal security. So it could be that the multinational forces will be there for quite a period. And we have to remember eight years of Lebanon being totally divided with literally warring and their own independent militias and so forth, and that's the function and the purpose of them, for our multinational forces being there.

Q. If it could follow up. Do you see the number increasing in the near future?

A. I haven't seen any sign of that. This would depend a lot on Lebanon and their needs, and whether they could demonstrate needs for this.

Government Regulation

Mr. President, Louis Harris recently announced the survey he conducted for Atlantic-Richfield, found that almost 90 percent of those who responded said that government should approve such things, for instance as new toys, for safety before they could be sold. And almost 70 percent said that government should bar TV ads that are misleading. And over all, the poll showed that people want government to interpose itself in the marketplace, especially in the area of consumer products. Do you agree with your off-said assertion that Americans think themselves overregulated, what do you make of Mr. Harris' poll?

A. Well, that's a case also, of which government level is the best one to do this, and whether this requires a giant Federal bureaucracy. When I was Governor of California, we did that at the state level, and very effectively. And there were also private sector things — Better Business Bureaus that do much the same thing. But I have to say, as you know I'm a Johnny-on-the-spot on this, a lot of things that are suggested for the Federal Government, I want to make sure that they aren't the legitimate function of another level of government, and that they can't be better done by another level of government.

Jerry:

Q. There have been some recent reports, Mr. President, raising the possibility that you might abandon black voters in the event that you seek reelection. Of course that's been denied by some officials in the White House. Even so, considering the backlash to your Administration's policies in such areas as the budget and civil rights, how do you see your chances with black voters in the event you seek re-election?

A. Jerry, I'd have perfect confidence in our chances with black voters in America if we could get the truth to them. I know that, again, that word perception has been carried on, and what the perception is.

First of all, you're hearing another official from the White House telling you that no, we're not casting any votes aside. And yes, I do think we have a lot to offer.

Now, among the perceptions that somehow our budget cuts have affected the black community more than any other. In our social or changes in social programs, all we have done is remove from the role level that we believe are at an income level that is above what is required for them to be getting some benefits at the cost or at the expense of their fellow taxpayers.

We have increased our ability to help those truly at the lower end of the scale. And the very fact of what we've been able to do with inflation. A family that had \$10,000 in 1979 and inflation, if we had left the inflation rate where it was, that is, at 10 percent, a family would only have \$7,900 in purchasing power. That's like cutting their income by \$2,100.

I think that — and you mentioned about civil rights. We are enforcing civil rights at a record level with regard to the charges made for criminal violation of civil rights. The same is true of our ability — the money that we have regained in wage disputes for people that have been denied their fair wages. We're setting a record in that.

We're out ahead of what has been done in the past in any one, number of those items. We have conducted some 21,000 inquiries into voting — what we think are suspected voting violations. And, as you know, we have extended the Voting Rights Act for a longer period than has ever been done in history.

What I think is that a pretty good batch of jobs has been done by us, and a great many people sincerely and honestly believe something that just is not true.

My belief has always been — and long before I ever got here — that wherever in this land any individual's Constitutional rights are being unjustly denied, it is the obligation of the Federal Government — at point of bayonet if necessary — to make sure that individual's constitutional rights.

Q. Mr. President, that statement and some others you have made recently have the markings of a candidate who indeed will run for office. Are you trying to tell us something, or are we misreading you?

A. Jerry, you're misreading to this extent: that a decision that has not to be made yet. But I think it would be the reason that the answer were no for me, that Republicans would still be under the cloud that I have just described, and I think that would be very difficult in a campaign in behalf — well, I intend right now to support Congressional candidates, constitutional candidates to the best of my ability and gubernatorial candidates.

Q. Mr. President, given the uncertainty about whether the withdrawal agreement in Lebanon will succeed, what are the prospects for getting our own U.S. marines out of Lebanon, and is it likely that the number of American troops may, in fact, increase in the near future?

A. Well, you have to remember what the multinational forces went in there for. The multinational forces are there to help the new Government of Lebanon maintain order until it can organize its military and its police and assume control over its own borders and its own internal security. So it could be that the multinational forces will be there for quite a period. And we have to remember eight years of Lebanon being totally divided with literally warring and their own independent militias and so forth, and that's the function and the purpose of them, for our multinational forces being there.

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